

The Suburban

magazine

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MAGAZINE CONFIDENTIAL

By MIKE COHEN

The grandson of Pablo Picasso brings his photo exhibit to Sofitel Golden Mile

David J. Azrieli passed away last August at the age of 92, yet the noted builder and philanthropist left quite a legacy. One of them, of course, is the beautiful downtown Sofitel Montreal Golden Mile. It was just another one of Azrieli's brilliant moves to bring the prestigious global hotel chain here.

You might want to stop by the Sherbrooke Street West locale between now and March to see an extraordinary exhibit of more than 30 images curated by Olivier Widmaier Picasso –the grandson of the legendary Pablo Picasso. He was in town on Wednesday for a formal launch of the Montreal leg of the five-city tour, which opened last June in New York City at a Sofitel I've had the pleasure of staying at.

"Revealed" is the name of the compelling photo exhibit that takes an intimate look at the world's greatest modern artists at work as they reveal themselves to the photographer. Olivier Widmaier Picasso is the author of Picasso, Portrait In Time (Albin Michel/Arte edition). He hand-selected the 30 photographs from the collection of Paris Match, the famous French weekly magazine.

Among the prized photographs to be displayed are a black-and-white image of Pablo Picasso eyeing a Dalmatian longing to climb upon his lap; Salvador Dalí seen sitting in animal exhibit at the Paris Zoo; Jeff Koons



Pablo Picasso and his dalmatian.

flows through our 120 Sofitel addresses on five continents."

Besides New York, "Revealed" has been to Washington and Chicago, with Beverly Hills (where I have also stayed), set for April. Then it is off to Europe.

As for Widmaier Picasso, he studied law and works as a producer and advisor for audiovisual media in Paris, as well as a license developer with numerous artists including the name and works of his grandfather Pablo Picasso. He recently co-produced and hosted TV documentaries about contemporary art and opera, and portraits of major creators in fashion, design, photography, architecture and music. His mother, Maya, is the daughter of Pablo Picasso and Marie-Thérèse Walter, with whom the artist was together from 1927 until 1944.

I asked Colliat why such a tour was initiated. "As an international ambassador of French Elegance, Sofitel Luxury Hotels wanted to provide a compelling photo exhibit and partner with a passionate artist to allow the public into the minds and lives of the world's greatest modern artists as they reveal themselves to the photographer," he responded. "Those who have seen the exhibit have had positive reactions, and developed a new and greater understanding of Sofitel's commitment to the arts through the brand's art and culture pillar."

The exhibit's grand opening on February 4 was an intimate gathering of industry tastemakers and LeClub ACCOR members, but now anyone can enjoy the experience. Sofitel is the only French luxury hotel brand with a presence on five continents with 120 addresses, in almost 40 countries. For more information on special offers run-

ning over the exhibit timeframe, visit www.sofitel.com

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Eight years after it was created by visionaries Charles McNeil, Joy Kertland and Craig Berger, the West Island Student Theatre Association (WISTA) continues to shine. An energetic combination of singers, dancers, technicians and musicians, aged 17 to 29, continue to produce outstanding musical theatre productions.

Next up for WISTA will be Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, with five shows scheduled February 19 to 22 at the Steve Murphy Theatre at Pierrefonds Comprehensive High School. Following its record-breaking Montreal premiere of *Legally Blonde: The Musical* in February 2013, which was seen by over 1,000 people, and their performance in February 2014 of the musical business satire *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, WISTA now embarks upon the story of Belle and the Beast with 28 performers who balance their studies in Montreal-area CEGEPs and universities.

Elizabeth Prévost is the director of the show, with Selin Genç as Belle, Zachary Sykes as The Beast, Joel Bernstein as Gaston, Alexandre Iannuzzi as Lumiere, Daniel Wilkenfeld as Cogsworth and Chelsea Bayer as Mrs Potts.

"We began rehearsals on September 7, so we have been at it for four months now," says Prévost. "Rehearsals are once a week on Sunday night for six hours for the chorus and we had added rehearsal hours during the week with some of the principal actors. Casting this show was difficult, but my main concern was being true to the story and who the characters really are. The Academy Award winning movie, on which this musical is based, is known and loved by an entire generation and their parents and most already know the characters. Unlike a little-known play, the audience already has an idea of what Belle should look like, how uptight Cogsworth can be and how bulging Gaston's muscles should be. So the challenge here is to find actors who will go beyond the preconceived image of their characters and make us discover more

about who this person really is and love them or hate them even more!"

While Genç and Sykes have seen the movie, neither has been in the audience for a live presentation of *Beauty and The Beast*. "I think out of all the classic Disney princesses, Belle is one of the most interesting to play because she's so strong-willed and independent," says Genç, a fourth year Mechanical Engineering student at McGill. "I've been with WISTA for four years and I love the experience. It's amazing to get the chance to perform and work with a diverse group of people who all share a passion for musical theatre. This is my sixth show with WISTA and the opportunities that they've given me have really helped develop me as a performer."

As for Pointe Claire native Sykes, who is studying History at McGill, he recently watched the movie again just before rehearsals started to get a feel for the character. "I absolutely love it," he says. "Everyone is so talented and passionate about the work they do, and it's a really friendly environment that feels very welcoming. They've almost become a kind of second family."



Salvador Dali at the zoo.

styling a BMW for the 24 Hours of Le Mans; Pierre Soulaiges crouching over a work in progress; Kees Van Dongen painting a posing Brigitte Bardot; and other striking images depicting Rene Magritte, Marc Chagall, Fernando Botero, Joan Miro, Jean Cocteau, Francis Bacon, and more.

"This is a striking exhibit of artists whose passion resembles what our global hotel and resort collection brings to the art of hospitality every day," said Dominique Colliat, executive vice president Hotel Services of Accor North & Central America and Caribbean. "We're delighted to have been able to draw on the talent of Olivier Widmaier Picasso. In 'Revealed,' we are also proud to uphold Sofitel's pillar of culture, which together with gastronomy and design combines into the French art de vivre that



Elizabeth Prévost

Prévost admits that working with 28 cast members has been a challenge. "Yes, crazy but also immensely fulfilling!" she said. "As you can imagine, dealing with 28 actors can be quite an adventure, but WISTA is a wonderful organization that allows people to be themselves at all times and this is what makes it work. There are no divas here and we put a lot of emphasis on respect and trust. Many of us have made friends for life because of WISTA and we cherish the time we spend making theatre together."

"When I took on this project, I knew right from the start that I did not want the play to have a cartoony or Disney-esque feel. I wanted to tell this beautiful love story in the most real way possible. No matter what their role was, I told each actor that they had to create their character's back story in



Selin Genç and Zachary Sykes in rehearsal.

order to be able to bring him or her to life - even if they play a wolf! Why is Gaston so pompous and arrogant? Did he have a difficult childhood? Where is Belle's mother? Has Mrs. Potts always been a servant? By doing this, I wanted the actors to dig a bit deeper thus making each decision they take on stage clear and true to the character they are representing. The audience will also see that the costumes truly represent the period the play is set in. Unlike the production seen on Broadway, we chose to go with more muted colours and the kind of clothing people would actually wear back then. Cogsworth, Lumiere and Mrs. Potts are not included in this!).

"The Disney movie is now a classic and many know the score and lyrics by heart. What is great about the musical is that there are many more songs and numbers that are not in the movie and were written for the stage. Those will be a nice surprise for everyone. The humour is also similar to Aladdin, so I believe children will be enchanted by the story and the music and the adults will giggle at the more 'mature' jokes! The dance numbers are also quite impressive; imagine 27 people dancing for Be Our Guest."

Beauty and the Beast will be presented on February 19, 20 and 21 at 7:30 PM, as

well as February 21 and 22 at 1:30 PM, 2015 at the Steve Murphy Theatre (Pierrefonds Comprehensive High School, 13800 boulevard Pierrefonds). Tickets are available from the online box office at www.WISTA.ca/tickets or through via the hotline at 514-998-7229.

LAKESHORE PLAYERS

The Lakeshore Players are presenting the second show in its

50th Anniversary Season of community theatre. Not Now, Darling is on stage at the

Louise Chalmers Theatre at John Rennie High School in Pointe Claire from February 5 to 14.

As the press release warns us, "watch as wives and mistresses cross paths as the philandering Gilbert Bodley turns to his business partner Arnold Crouch to keep all the balls in the air after his wife returns early from a vacation. But Gilbert is not the only lecherous character in this fast paced farce. Who gets the coat? Who stays in their clothes? Who ends up with whom? Only time and an expensive fur coat can tell. Join us for a zany comedy romp filled with sex, lies and more than a little innuendo."

The creative team behind the production is led by Steve Gillam (Director/Set Design), and includes Lise Fortin (Stage Manager), Alex Smith (Lighting Design), Eric Sauvé (Sound Design), Lotthida Inthanavong and Stéphane Dauphin-Pierre (Costume Design).

For ticket information and times call (514) 631-8718.

SARAH SEGAL LAZAR

Montreal singer-songwriter Sarah Segal-Lazar's debut album *Two if by Sea* was officially launched last Friday night at Grumpy's Bar downtown, a pretty good piece of work which I had some time to listen to over the weekend. Sarah does not remember that the first time I met her was at Westmount Park. She was about four at

the time, on the back of a bicycle driven by her dad Barry - a noted documentary filmmaker. Now she is a talented 26 year old singer-songwriter who has roots in NDG, Prince Edward Island and New York City. Sarah says she would like to thank everyone who helped fund the album through her Indiegogo campaign. "My local post office and I spent some quality time together this week and parcels are on their way!" she said. Log on to <https://sarahsegalmusic.bandcamp.com>

Many of the songs in her acoustic-folk album are entwined with the sea, which she chalks up to the fact that she's always lived on islands. In 2008 she left Montreal for New York City, where she studied Experimental Theatre at NYU. Though she'd been writing songs since she was a child, it was the encouragement of the Experimental Theatre program that persuaded her to pursue songwriting and begin performing at bars and clubs in the Big Apple. She has performed in cities across Canada and the United States, as well as Off-Broadway, and her music has been played on national radio, including CBC's "As it Happens." *Two if by Sea* marks Sarah's first solo record. From songs about breaking up with a city ("Gotham") to living as a sailor ("Whence We Came"), the album is a collection of musical poetry that searches for answers of belonging, both in the world and in oneself. After all, what's a folk album without a few tales of heartache? Combining her passions of music and theatre, Sarah has written two musicals, both



Sarah-Segal Lazar

activists to ensure that it will not be said that we were silent when our enemies mobilized their forces against the Judaeo-Christian values in Canada."

BEAUTIFUL THEATRE

The folks at Beautiful City Theatre are excited to be bringing their 2010 Obie



In rehearsals, performers portraying the wolves display their attack on the Beast.



of which were met with critical acclaim. Her first musical, *Talk, Mackerel* was hailed "the talk of the Montreal Fringe Festival" and "one of the runaway hits at [the 2013] Fringe." It was nominated for four awards at the 2013 Montreal Fringe and was the winner of the award for Best Production to Tour.

DIMANT APPOINTMENT

Native Montrealer Frank Dimant, who retired a few months ago as CEO of B'nai Brith Canada, has resurfaced already. He becomes the first CEO of Christians United For Israel (CUFI) "Today Jews and Christians must stand together to confront the Islamist terrorists and their allies," said Dimant, a graduate of the former Northmount High School in Côte des Neiges. "The challenge is great but we dare not be complacent. We must mobilize the

Award-winning (Best New American Play) production of *Circle Mirror Transformation* for its Montreal premiere February 6 to 8 at the cozy Studio 303 on Ste. Catherine Street. That will follow its revival in New York City a week earlier. The play centers around a drama teacher and her students and how they get along over the course of six weeks of class. Montreal cast members are Renée Hodgins (Theresa), Eleni Metrakos (Lauren) and Natalie Bartosek (Stage Manager). Info: <http://www.beautifulcitytheatre.com>.

Have you got something to share? Email mcohen@thesuburban.com or call 514-484-9203, ext. 307. Follow me on Twitter @mikecohensl and at <http://blog.thesuburban.com>